

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

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HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

Written County material was studied by appointed members of the Health and Human Services Committee who then interviewed department Directors and their staff members.

The following departments were reviewed:

- Behavioral Health
- Children's Services
- Preschool Services
- Public Health
- Veterans Affairs

Following are the reports and recommendations of the Health and Human Services Committee.

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

BACKGROUND

The San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) provides an array of bilingual, geographically dispersed services to all County residents seeking mental health care.

Outpatient and inpatient mental health services are managed by the Behavioral Health Department and coordinated through the Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (ARMC). The departments of Behavioral and Public Health and ARMC report directly to the County Administrative Officer.

FINDINGS

Outpatient services are provided at clinics located in all regions of the County. A 90-bed unit at ARMC provides inpatient care to patients with acute psychiatric disorders.

The administrative headquarters of Behavioral Health is located at 820 E. Gilbert Street, San Bernardino, in a building called the *East Valley Resource Center*. The building, which opened February 23, 2004, occupies approximately 22,000 square feet of administrative and mental health care offices. Behavioral Health still needs 25,000 to 30,000 square feet of additional space to provide mental health services. Additional administrative offices and clinics are located in four older County-owned buildings at 700 East Gilbert Street.

Eleven (11) buildings are located at the Gilbert Street site. Five (5) are closed due to public safety reasons. Two buildings (DBH Warehouse #1 and Building #5) are used for storage. A house at 655 Gilbert Street, an old thrift store, and Building H, which was a hospital, are currently empty. A building that was once a chapel is now identified by a makeshift sign on a surrounding chain link fence as the "Gabrielle Mulvane Community Center". The building, not owned by Behavioral Health, is currently operated by the community-based, non-profit organization, I.C.U.C., under a Board of Supervisors approved contract.

The Gilbert Street and Paseo Way entrances provide access to the buildings, which are identified by numbers or alphabetical letters. At the Gilbert Street entrance a deteriorating sign with faded lettering advertises the County of San Bernardino Department of Behavioral Health. The other weathered sign at the Paseo Way entrance lists incorrect and outdated information about the buildings and the services they provide.

Buildings 2 and 3 were built in the late 1960s. Building 4 was built in 1972 and construction on Building 5 was completed shortly after. The buildings are modular trailer units that were erected with a 15-year life expectancy. Building 6 was completed in August 1995. During their existence they have been investigated for unsafe conditions that pose a potential threat to the health and safety of Behavioral Health employees and patients.

Computer records at the Risk Management Division of the Human Resources Department, dating from November 10, 1998 to October 31, 2003, outline investigations of the buildings for poor air quality, formaldehyde exposure, dry rot, leaking roofs, mold contamination, dead birds and bird droppings between interior walls, and rodent infestation to such an extent that rats have been discovered in the ceilings, insulation and the sub-flooring of the buildings.

Building 4 has had a history of complaints from employees about odors in the facility. Known as the Phoenix Outpatient Clinic, \$10,000 was spent to clean the air ducts in November 2003. Because it provides outpatient mental health services to adults, it requires Medi-Cal certification every two years. Consequently, the building has to be rehabilitated every four years. It cost \$69,000 for asbestos abatement and overall refurbishing of the building during the initial months of 2004. To demolish the structure would cost an estimated \$40,000 to \$50,000.

Buildings 5 and 6 have been investigated for roof leaks, mold contamination, and poor indoor air quality when employees complained of upper respiratory symptoms. Building 5 was unilaterally closed by Behavioral Health in 2002 when it indicated it no longer wanted to expend additional funds to remedy the mold contamination.

Risk Management contends that the building was closed by a mutual decision of both departments. It did say that the number of complaints about the conditions at the Gilbert Street buildings exceeded the norm for County buildings. The building remains closed despite Risk Management's June 17, 2002 memo which stated "...the facility can be safely occupied once the mold abatement is completed."

RECOMMENDATIONS

04-27 REPLACE ALL OUTDATED SIGNS AT THE GILBERT STREET LOCATION WITH MORE USER-FRIENDLY, STRATEGICALLY PLACED ENTRANCE SIGNS DISPLAYING A MASTER DIRECTORY AND MAP THAT PROVIDES DIRECTIONS TO PATIENTS, VISITORS AND EMERGENCY VEHICLES THAT MAY BE SUMMONED TO THE LOCATION TO HANDLE LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCIES.

- 04-28 IDENTIFY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BUILDINGS AT THE GILBERT STREET LOCATION USING BUILDING PLACARDS THAT DESIGNATE THE SERVICES AVAILABLE IN EACH BUILDING.
- 04-29 REQUIRE THAT ALL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BUILDINGS AT THE GILBERT STREET LOCATION HAVE PAMPHLET MAPS TO ASSIST VISITORS AND PATIENTS IN FINDING THEIR WAY AROUND THE AREA.
- 04-30 CONDUCT REGULAR SAFETY INSPECTIONS OF THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BUILDINGS AT THE GILBERT STREET LOCATION TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EMPLOYEES AND PATIENTS, AND PROVIDE A WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT THAT DOES NOT PLACE THE COUNTY AT A LIABILITY RISK.
- 04-31 CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE COST EFFECTIVENESS OF MAINTAINING CLOSED BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDING PROPERTY AT THE GILBERT STREET LOCATION AND EVALUATE THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF REMODELING/DEMOLISHING OLD BUILDINGS VERSUS CONSTRUCTING NEW BUILDINGS SO MONEY IS NOT WASTED IN CONTINUOUSLY REFURBISHING BUILDINGS THAT WILL EVENTUALLY STILL NEED TO BE REPLACED.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

BACKGROUND

Children in San Bernardino County are served by several departments and agencies. They include Child Support Services, the Children's Network, the Department of Behavioral Health, the Department of Children's Services and the Preschool Services Department. All are divisions of the County's Human Services System.

The Department of Children's Services (DCS) provides family centered programs and services designed to insure safe, permanent nurturing families while strengthening and attempting to preserve the family unit. The three main services of Foster Care, Child Protective Services and Adoption Services are provided by a staff of approximately 900.

FINDINGS

The Department of Children's Services has over 5,000 children placed out of their homes in various shelter care programs, including some out-of-state placements.

In addition to the department headquarters in San Bernardino, there are satellite offices serving families in outlying areas of the County.

The caseload is 35-70 children for each social worker, allowing just a few hours a month to spend on each child. Sometimes this is conducted through telephone calls. Our investigation revealed the need to correct the ratio of social workers to children/clients. There is no recommended caseload from the State.

During this Grand Jury's tenure there was frequent publicity about the frustration of families in the system who felt disenfranchised from their children. They were vocal at the Board of Supervisors meetings and received media attention. The issues could not be solved within the Board's legal scope because State and Federal legislation and mandates of the Court system prevent changing Court decisions.

The serious problem of social worker understaffing could be lessened by the use of volunteers. However, volunteers in the department have to be specially trained because of the confidentiality of cases. Currently this training is not provided. DCS is hopeful that the Human Services System will develop a large cadre of volunteers who are screened and properly trained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 04-32 HIRE MORE SOCIAL WORKERS TO CORRECT THE OUT OF BALANCE
RATIO OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO CLIENTS.

- 04-33 MAKE FUNDS AVAILABLE TO HIRE AN ADMINISTRATOR TO OVERSEE
TRAINING AND COORDINATION OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES.

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

BACKGROUND

The Public Health Department enforces all Health and Safety codes. Its primary function is to protect the citizens of the County from any outbreak of disease or chronic illness, and maintain an accurate tracking system should such an occurrence take place.

FINDINGS

The County Administrative Office seeks to improve service and reduce costs by closely evaluating services provided by the Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (ARMC), the Department of Behavioral Health and the Public Health Department. The directors of Behavioral Health and Public Health report directly to the County Administrative Officer (CAO). This will facilitate the future restructuring of these operations without any immediate changes to salaries or staffing.

Grand Jury investigation noted duplication of Behavioral Health services, facilities and personnel located in close proximity to ARMC. Relocating these services and personnel to ARMC and reducing the need for leased clinical space will bring immediate cost savings to the County.

The citizens of this County and past Grand Juries recommended that a restaurant grading system be implemented. On April 27, 2004 the Board of Supervisors directed the Department of Public Health to prepare a restaurant inspection grading ordinance for adoption and to report back to the Board within 45 days.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 04-34 CONSOLIDATE SERVICES, FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS WITH ARROWHEAD REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER (ARMC).

- 04-35 IMPLEMENT A RESTAURANT GRADING SYSTEM THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY.

VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

BACKGROUND

The San Bernardino County office of Veterans Affairs is a department within the County Human Services System. Established in 1926, it is the oldest county veterans' service office in the state and the nation.

The County currently has the fourth largest veteran population in the State of California. The department was created to help local veterans and their families obtain veterans' benefits from Federal, State and local agencies. 568,000 veterans, dependents and survivors reside in San Bernardino County.

Members of the Grand Jury visited the main Veterans Affairs office in San Bernardino and the part-time office in Twentynine Palms that provides service in that area every other week.

FINDINGS

San Bernardino County Veterans Service Representatives are not employees of the Federal government; they are County employees who assist veterans with claims. They work closely with service officers from most of the main veteran's organizations. They play an important role in the national veteran's advocacy network.

There is minimal duplication between the County and the Federal government. The Federal veterans' offices in the County provide medical care, health services and psychological counseling. The only non-medical veterans' service for County residents, other than the County Veterans Affairs office, is in West Los Angeles.

The San Bernardino office has one supervisor, two full-time and one part-time service representatives and two clerks. The Chino office has one supervisor and one clerk. The Victorville office has one supervisor, three service representatives and two clerks. The department also conducts one day a week visitation to the Loma Linda VA Hospital and USDVA Counseling Center on Hospitality Lane in the city of San Bernardino.

Barstow, Yucca Valley and Twentynine Palms are only visited twice a month. They utilize office space in local senior or community centers. Office hours are 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The single Veterans' Services Representative sees 30 to 50 veterans or dependents on an average day, with a waiting list that carries over to the next visit. The large veterans' population in Twentynine Palms and Yucca Valley ranges from servicemen about to be discharged from the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base to elderly World War II veterans, and is steadily increasing.

RECOMMENDATION

04-36 INCREASE THE OFFICE VISITS AND OFFICE HOURS IN THE YUCCA VALLEY AND TWENTYNINE PALMS OFFICES OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE WEEKLY SERVICE.